

AN EMERGING INCOME GAP: A STUDY OF A HAMLET IN THE MAHAWELI DEVELOPMENT AREA, SRI LANKA

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Peasant Farmers who have been settled under the Mahaweli Irrigation Scheme have been given 2½ acre plots and therefore, have ostensibly equitable access to land resource. One would imagine that would lead to disparities in income being minimal, if not absent. But on closer interaction with them and indepth observation makes it apparent that this is not the case. There appears to be a growing disparity of income.

Available water supply directly effects production. Peasant farmers who have sufficient water have a yield well above the others. This has led yield to vary from 35 bushels per acre to 115 bushels per acre in Maha (rainy) season of 1978/79. 34% of the farmers have harvested below 80 bushels per acre. Only 28% has got above 100 bushels per acre.

Poor yields have snow-balling adverse consequences for the peasant farmer. He has less surplus for sale, this in turn leading to inadequate or lack of capital for the next season's cultivation. He turns invariably to non-institutional credit. His customary low yields never permits him to settle his credit. Thus, low yields of paddy impoverish the peasant and lead to increasing indebtedness to the boutique keepers, (Lunqvist, 1978), and the better off farmers. As a result, they do not have sufficient resources to cultivate their paddy lands systematically.

An increasing income gap is to be noticed as a result of this, with insufficient water supply being the crucial factor that sets the process in motion.

References:

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